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ABSTRACT

The first in a series of manuals designed for instructor/coordinators of Richland College's cooperative education seminars, this volume contains two learning modules focusing on basic communication and speaking and listening skills. First, the manual examines the growing emphasis on communication skills in business, emphasizing changes in corporate structure and philosophy, the amount of work time spent communicating, and the costs of ineffective communication in business. Next, the module on the basics of communication discusses the role of the sender, receiver, message, and environment in the communication process; corporate concerns about this process; and the influences of personal life orientations, perceptions, and expectations, and of position, stereotyping, and individual labels on effective communication. The module on speaking and listening skills examines one- and two-way communication; the speaker's responsibility for creating a climate conducive to effective communication, for being direct, for using specific but simple words and phrases, for requesting feedback, and for listening carefully. It also considers ways of communicating more effectively by adjusting one's attitude, using open-ended questions, and listening; and ways to improve listening habits. Each module introduces basic concepts and principles in an overview for instructors and states objectives, lists additional resources, and contains exercises and other instructional materials. (DAB)

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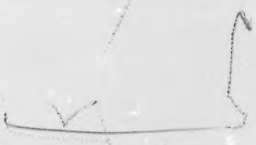

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INSTRUCTOR RESOURCE MANUAL

for

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION SEMINARS

BOOK 1

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CONTENTS

	Number of Pages
About the Author	
Guide to Effective Seminars	
Introduction to Communication	8
Basics of Communication Module	
Overview/Objectives and Resources	2
Instructor's Review of Topic	11
Exercises	1
Summary Sheet	2
Application	2
Speaking and Listening Module	
Overview/Objectives and Resources	2
Instructor's Review of Topic	16
Exercises	2
Summary Sheet	2
Application	1

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This series was written by Dr. Jane Peterson. Dr. Peterson has taught at Richland College for ten years. She received her B.A. from Bethel College and the M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Arkansas.

Dr. Peterson is currently on a one-year sabbatical leave working as an intern with the Document Design Project (DDP) funded through the Teaching and Learning/Reading and Language Group at the National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C.

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE SEMINARS

These volumes of seminar materials were produced by professionals in each subject area. They are designed to provide Cooperative Education instructor/coordinators with an adequate supply of information and resource material to conduct seminars that are pertinent and applicable to the students' needs.

Each volume contains materials for lecture notes, exercises, work sheets, illustrations, case studies, and problem solving exercises. The guide provides basic concepts and principles that will generate self-development and individual and group interaction in learning.

Specific Objectives

1. To provide a resource of written material, reference books, and audio visual materials to supplement the instructor's experience.

2. To present the written material in a ready-to use format that requires only the instructor's personalized modification.

3. To provide case studies, exercises, quizzes, and role plays to involve all students in the seminar.

4. To encourage each instructor to develop additional lesson plans from the ideas and ample information contained in the guides.

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YOU can add vitality and interest to your seminars by applying these few suggestions.

*First, help each student build confidence and create a desirable attitude toward Co-op as well as their job.

*Identify the students' abilities as well as their needs and challenge them; keep them coming back for more.

*Conduct the seminar to include all the members of the group; make it easy for everyone to participate.

*Use varied methods to present the materials; lectures, problem analysis, case studies, guest speakers, debates, and panel discussions are a few methods that may be utilized.

*Develop your own individual style; conduct the seminars in a way that is comfortable for you.

*Pace your seminars to maintain the students' interest; timing is learned with experience.

Remember, with your own special teaching abilities and a little pre-planning, you will be able to conduct excellent seminars.

WHY ARE COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS IMPORTANT TODAY?

An Introduction to the Communications Skills Modules

Each year businesses seem to expect more from our students--more technical expertise, more practical experience, and more theory. However, the expectations don't stop with a solid foundation in the student's own field. Prospective employers are concerned about other areas as well. For example, in various surveys personnel officers and managers are listing effective communication skills as a very high priority for employees, even those seeking jobs that have not traditionally emphasized such skills:

* in a recent survey of personnel officers, 85% indicated that a person's chance for success in his or her company depended upon being able to communicate effectively.[1]

* in a survey of executives of California companies, 66% indicated that communications skills played a major role in their advancement and 94% reported that they use communications skills extensively in their present positions.[2]

The reasons given for this widespread emphasis on communications skills generally fit one of two categories: (a) effective communication skills are scarce among today's graduates and therefore valuable; or (b) effective communication skills now play a more central role than they once did in making businesses and industries profitable. Let's briefly examine each.

Effective Communicators Are Scarce

The rather widespread belief that effective communicators are rare is probably quite valid: learning to communicate clearly and effectively is not easy. However, explaining the value of good communications skills by their scarcity is often mistakenly linked to the "literacy crisis".[3] What is assumed is that those who graduated 25 or 30 years ago were effective communicators and today's students are not. Certainly some of the graduates of the 1950's communicated well just as some recent graduates do. But all? Not now and not then.

A favorite tactic is to point to verbal test scores to explain the scarcity of good communications skills today and to attribute better skills to graduates of the past. However, this tactic has major drawbacks. First, there are the difficulties of comparing verbal test scores of current students with those who graduated one or two generations ago--the total populations are simply not comparable. (Many attending college today would not have considered themselves "college material" had they completed high school in 1948 instead of 1978 and would not have taken standardized tests.) Second, there is the difficulty of establishing a direct relation between what those verbal tests measure and the requirements of effective on-the-job communication. For even if you give the 1940's or 50's graduate better skills in what these tests supposedly measure (vocabulary, reading rate and comprehension, and correct use of the written language), you still do not necessarily have an effective communicator. Being able to write correctly and read quickly does not qualify anyone as an effective communicator.

Because an estimated 90% of all communication is oral, an effective communicator must first be a good speaker and a good listener. However, a good speaker is not necessarily someone who speaks correctly. In many situations, formal usage creates barriers and even misunderstanding. For example, a supervisor might better communicate with a worker by saying, "Think you can wind this up if I stay and help an hour?" than by fully and formally stating "If I were to stay an extra hour to assist you, would you be able to complete this project today?" The more formal offer might be interpreted as condescending, stuffy, even phoney, and the worker's response to it defensive. The overall result could be that the absolutely correctly stated offer would create problems with the worker, not solve them. In short, the key to effective on-the-job communication is not correctness, but being able to tailor the message for the receiver. So effective communicators have probably always been scarce, and though they remain scarce today, the "literacy crisis" and low scores on verbal tests cannot be tagged the necessary cause.

But if effective communications skills have long been scarce, why the current emphasis on them? Is this just another fad? Will communications skills be out of the spotlight soon? Won't technological advances, especially computer related ones, preempt much of the need for "good communications skills"? In

other words, will it be worth my time to develop a communications unit for seminar students? And will it be worth their time?

Although no one can be absolutely certain, communications skills will probably remain in the spotlight for many years. One reason for this prediction is that many factors--both in and out of the business world--have converged to move communications skills to center stage.

Effective Communications Skills Play an Important Role in Making Businesses Profitable

When business people today talk about the importance of effective communication, they are not just talking about the importance of executives learning to communicate. Instead, they are talking about developing communications skills in secretaries, line supervisors, machinists, and clerks--in workers at various levels throughout a company. Like most changes, this shift to emphasizing communications skills throughout an organization has been caused by more than one factor. The major changes contributing to this shift seem to be (1) changes in corporate structure and philosophy, (2) recognition of the amount of time spent communicating on the job, and (3) recognition of the possible costs of ineffective communication.

Changes in Corporate Structure and Philosophy

The shift from a classical view of organizations through a human relations view to the current social systems and contingency views has affected the forms of communication needed, the frequency, the numbers of people needing to communicate, and the purpose of communication. A brief review of each will make the impact on communication clearer.[4]

The classical view, begun in the early 1900's and often called "scientific management", assumed that an organization could be designed to work like a machine, that workers ("human machines") were primarily motivated by money, and that relationships should be impersonal. The focus was on structure and function--dividing responsibility and authority into levels and specializing tasks. Executives believed that if all was carefully divided, the

organization could run smoothly. The overall structure was hierarchical, forming a relatively tall pyramid; most formal communication was vertical (and largely "downward").

The human relations view, developed in the 1930's and early 40's, assumed that an organization could work like a social unit (primarily a family), that workers were motivated by human considerations (recognition, praise, participation in decision making, etc.), and that relationships should be personal. The focus became relational--getting cooperation by motivating workers rather than using authority and control. Managers believed that better relationships would lead to happier workers and greater productivity. The overall structure remained hierarchical (essentially only the assumptions changed), but the pyramid was often flatter because the span of control widened. Formal horizontal channels of communication developed, and upward communication became more common and more important.

The social systems view, developed in the 1960's and 70's, assumes that the organization is an open system (affecting and being affected both by externals and by its components), that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that workers are motivated by various considerations. The focus is on inter-dependence and the changes created by the interaction of components. Communication is seen as the key for integrating the complex system of interacting, interdependent components: without effective communication, the organization cannot achieve task goals. No one organizational structure is associated with this view. "Contingency theorists" advocate there is no "best way" to organize--what is best will depend upon conditions in the external environment. In stable industries, highly structured hierarchies might work best while in rapidly changing industries, a low structured, non-bureauocratic system might be best. With the advent of a social systems view, informal communications have gained importance and new formal communications networks ("all channel networks", circles, chains, and wheels) have developed.

Recognition of the Amount of Time Spent Communicating

Various studies have revealed that workers spend much of their time communicating. Here are a few frequently quoted statistics:

--"Klemmer and Snyder (1972) studied [by direct observation] the workday activities of more than 2,600 professional, technical, administrative, and clerical people, all of whom worked in a large communication research and development laboratory....They found that 50 percent to 80 percent of a typical workday was spent communicating, and two-thirds of this communication was talking."[5]

--about half of a business executive's time is spent listening

--first line managers may spend 60% of their time communicating

--the average manager spends 50-90% of his or her time communicating

With so much time invested in communication, businesses want a good return (information relayed accurately, problems solved, etc.). To achieve that return, companies need employees who can communicate effectively.

Recognition of the Costs of Ineffective Communication

On-the-job communication is often ineffective. One study (Nichols 1962) revealed that only 20% of the information sent through downward communication channels reached the workers for whom it was intended.[6] Nichols also revealed problems with upward communication when he asked managers to rank factors that contribute to good morale. What employees considered the top three factors, managers ranked as the bottom three.[7] Misinformation and misunderstandings--whether general or specific, whether upward, downward, or horizontal--can be expensive in terms of time, morale, and hard dollars.

First, time is money and ineffective communication requires more time than effective communication. Ineffective communication results in longer than necessary meetings, telephone calls, memos, letters, and reports; ineffective communication also lead to more frequent meetings, telephone calls, memos, letters, and reports. With the average hourly wage for production and non-supervisory workers at $7.41 (October 1981 figure for private payrolls)[8], the cost of ineffective communication can mount quickly.

The expense of time theft can suggest just how quickly "odd moments" add up to substantial figures. Executives estimate that employees steal (i.e. "deliberately waste and abuse") an average of four hours and eighteen minutes each week, making the cost of "time theft" an estimated $120 billion a year in American industries.[9] With the amount of time invested in communication, what is the potential time cost of ineffective communication? It must be staggering.

Second, ineffective communication is expensive in terms of morale. Being able to communicate is important to us as human beings; one of the most severe punishments given is solitary confinement. In personal terms, husbands and wives often punish one another by refusing to speak or refusing to listen; parents punish children by sending them to their rooms or forbidding them to speak. As humans we all seem to need to be able to express our ideas and have someone listen when we do. It is not surprising, then, that workers who feel no one listens when they talk are likely to feel frustrated and angry. If the situation continues, they may undermine the work of the organization through various "subversive" activities. Apparently, effective communication is one of the factors in the morale-productivity issue. A University of Michigan study indicated "that in the most productive departments, every worker spoke highly of the communication skills of the department head, while in the least productive department only 26% of the workers rated the boss as highly skilled as a communicator."[10]

Third, ineffective communication is expensive in terms of hard dollars. The average business letter costs $6.00 - $8.00 to prepare; if it is poorly written and generates needless correspondence or telephone calls, the cost of ineffective communication rises. If a sales representative misunderstands a customer's order and has the wrong items delivered, it costs hard dollars. When long distance telephone calls must be made to clarify the meaning of a letter or report, it costs hard dollars.

Communication Skills Are Gaining Importance Off the Job as well as On the Job

Everyone, it seems, understands that "communication" involves more than being physically able to utter words or hear

them. People talk about developing skills so they can communicate with those important to them--spouses, children, aging parents, friends, doctors, lawyers, teachers, even salespeople. Of course the line between assertiveness training and communications training becomes quite fuzzy, but whatever the term, the focus on effective communication as an important learned skill is clear.

In fact, this trend is global, not just national. Many futurists are labelling the new the post-industrial era (what Toeffler calls the "Third Wave") as the "Information Age", the "Age of Communication", or the "Age of Cooperation". The concept of interdependence at all levels--economic interdependence, ecological interdependence, technological interdependence, et cetera--is so strong that for many futurists the words information, communication, and cooperation are virtually synonymous.

Most futurists also see technological advances, especially microprocessors and telecommunications, as simultaneously increasing the opportunities to communicate and the need for effective communicators. It appears that if technology will decrease the importance of good communications skills in any area, it will be in the correctness of writing. Many word processors already on the market include dictionaries and proof-reading programs to identify (and in some cases correct) misspelled words. Programs that can identify problems in punctuation and syntax will probably appear in the near future. However, the hallmark of effective writers, like effective speakers, is not correctness but the ability to tailor the message for the receiver.

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[1]Roy M. Berko, et. al., This Business of Communicating (Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown Publishers, 1980), p. 1.

[2]Berko, et. al., p.1.

[3]The literacy crisis does, of course, affect businesses (see

Sheila Tefft, "Illiterate Employees Pose Real Problems for U.S. Businesses," Dallas Times Herald, Monday, February 22, 1982, p. 6-B). Some companies have even developed remedial programs in writing and reading for employees; however, the literacy issue is relatively recent and focuses on basic competence. The communications issue--the issue of whether people can transfer ideas and information clearly and accurately--focuses on effectiveness. The two are separate, though related, problems: illiteracy can certainly complicate communications problems, but illiteracy should not be considered the sole cause of communications problems.

[4]Allen D. Frank, Communicating on the Job (Glenville, IL: Scott Foresman and Co., 1982), pp. 34-48. The information on each of the three views is large based on Frank's presentation of them.

[5]Frank, p. 3. The three figures that follow this direct quotation appear in many sources, from fliers describing communications textbooks, films and seminars to company-produced booklets like the thirty-three page booklet What a Supervisor Should Know About Improving Communications Skills prepared by Georgette McGregor for Dartnell Corporation (Chicago, IL: Dartnell Press, 1980).

[6]Frank, pp. 49-50.

[7]Frank, p. 54.

[8]Judith Willis, "'Time Theft' Costs At Least 120 Billion," Dallas Times Herald, Monday, February 1, 1982, p. 6-D.

[9]Willis, p. 6-D.

[10]Berko, p. 1.

THE BASICS OF COMMUNICATION

I. OBJECTIVES: The student will be able to

A. define communication as a process involving four interacting elements

B. list several different on-the-job communication activities

C. explain what is meant by the statement, "Meaning resides in people, not in words"

D. define "life orientation" and explain how it affects communication

E. describe at least two common barriers to effective communication

II. MODULE MATERIALS

A. Instructor's Review of Topic

B. Exercises: The Basics of Communication

C. Student Summary Sheet: The Basics of Communication

D. Application

III. OTHER RESOURCES

A. Communications: HEMI Module (a kit designed for those responsible for training managers in higher education). The kit contains some background information, a videotape, exercises and handouts, as well as diagrams suitable for transparencies. The most useful parts of the kit will probably be the diagrams of the communication process and the exercises on how expectations affect perception and interpretation. The videotape is divided into very short (3 to 8 minute) segments, each designed to illustrate a particular point or lead into an exercise. At Richland, all HEMI modules are kept in the office of the President's Administrative Assistant.

B. Frank, Allen D. Communicating on the Job. Glenville, Ill.: Scott Foresman and Co., 1982. Chapter One ("Understanding the Communication Process"), Chapter Two ("Communicating within Organizational Structures"), and Chapter Three ("Using Language to Communicate Clearly") are particularly relevant.

C. Hayakawa, S. I. Language in Thought and Action, 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt Brace, Javanovich, 1972. A standard work useful for its treatment of the ladder of abstraction and extensional-intensional relationships (language-to-reality relationships).

D. Meaning in People, a 24 minute, 16 mm. color film. Uses effective visuals to introduce the idea that communication is a process, not a simple transfer of message from one to another. Uses on the job events to show that meaning is in people, not in words and phrases; also discusses signs of communication breakdown and reactions to such breakdown. The narrator's opening and closing remarks assume an audience of managers, but the film is appropriate for almost any audience because examples include secretaries, white collar workers, a repair person or foreman, etc.

E. Segal, Sydney Joelson, ed. Imagery: Current Cognitive Approaches. New York: Academic Press, 1971. Chapter Two ("Imagery and Language" by Alan Paivio) and Chapter Five ("Processing the Stimulus in Imagery and Perception" by Sydney Segal) are especially relevant for additional information on the relationship between expectation and perception and for descriptions of experiments that suggest expectation influences perception.

F. Verbal Communication: The Power of Words, a 30 minute, 16 mm. color film. An overview of oral communication including disappointment of miscommunication, discussion of the speaker's responsibilities for effective communication, demonstrations of one and two way communication, and pointers for getting feedback. Effective as a transition from "Basics of Communication" module to "Speaking and Listening" module.

NOTE: The DCCCD also owns several 16 mm. films on perception, prejudice, and stereotyping, all topics that could be developed in conjunction with communications. Here are titles of some of the films you might wish to preview and use if you want to expand on these related topics.

Topic of Perception:
- Eye of the Beholder (25 minutes)
- Perception (15 minutes)
- The Sensory World (33 minutes)

Topic of Prejudice:
- Black and White: Uptight (35 minutes)
- Chromophobia (11 minutes)
- Everybody's Prejudice (21 minutes)
- Prejudice: Causes, Consequences, and Cures (26 minutes)

Topic of Stereotyping:
- Sex Role Development (23 minutes)
- also see listings for prejudice

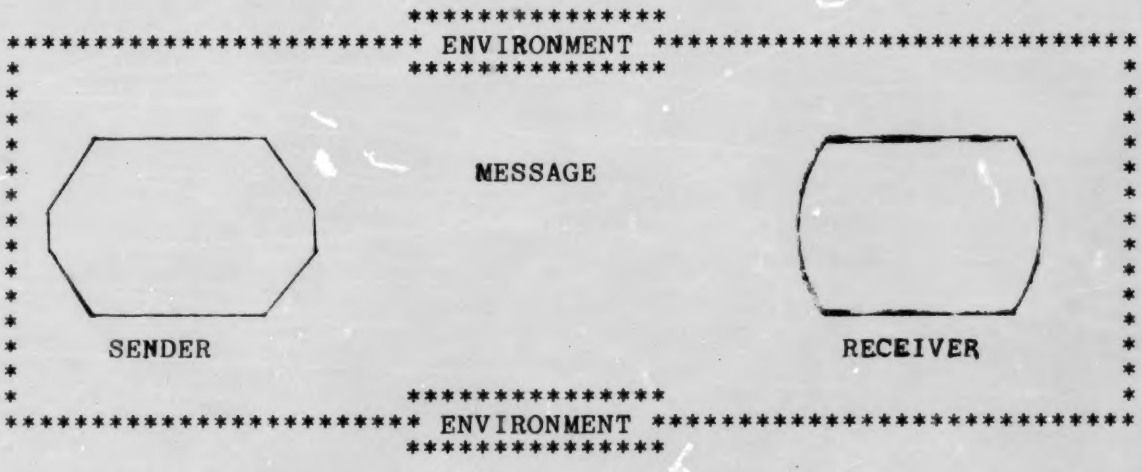
THE BASICS OF COMMUNICATION: Instructor's Review of Topic

Communication is a part of our everyday lives. To express our ideas, values, and needs, we can speak, write, or gesture; to learn what others are thinking and feeling, we listen, read, or watch. Because these activities are so common, we often take them for granted. Yet these various forms of communication fulfill a basic human need--the need to understand and be understood. The need to communicate is so basic that we can punish others by taking away the privilege of communication (sending children to their rooms or prisoners to solitary confinement).

To understand and be understood, however, involves more than being physically able to utter words and hear them. Communication is not merely a matter of physiological function, and it's not just a product either (even though people may refer to a memo as "a communication"). Instead, communication is a process that is dynamic, not static.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The communication process, as it is commonly described today, involves four basic elements: the sender, the receiver, the message, and the environment.



These four elements are part of the process whether the sender is a speaker or writer, whether the receiver is a listener or reader, and whether the message is verbal or nonverbal. One important point is that the message is only one element in the communication process. A second important point is that the process is an open system.

In oral communication in particular, each of the elements constantly changes. The speaker is affected by the changing environment, by his thoughts and the sound of his own voice, by the actual words or message, and by the nonverbal response of the listener. The environment is affected by the sounds and movements of speaker and listener; the listener is affected by his own thoughts, the environment, the verbal message, and the nonverbal cues received from the speaker. Finally, the message, both verbal and nonverbal, changes in response to changes in the other elements. This interaction of elements makes communication an open system filled with feedback. The result is that what appears to be a simple process is actually very complex.

WHY ARE BUSINESSES SO INTERESTED IN THIS PROCESS?

One reason is simply that communication is an essential part of everyday work life. It consumes a significant proportion of work time and money. An estimated 50 to 90 percent of a manager's time is spent communicating. Other white collar workers (salespeople, secretaries, data processors, etc.) also spend many hours each week communicating with clients or customers, coworkers, and supervisors. Because time is money, communication is a major expense. Another reason is that there are so many forms the process takes in today's organizations. With more companies adopting either a human relations or a social systems approach, more employees than ever before are involved with more kinds of communication-based activities. Here are just a few common activities:

Speaking and Listening

* answering the telephone
* calling someone else
* conducting meetings (sales meetings, board meetings, committee meetings, task force meetings, problem solving meetings, status report meetings, etc.)

* attending various meetings
* conducting workshops and seminars
* attending workshops and seminars
* interviewing (employment interviews, information-gathering interviews, performance review interviews, etc.)
* being interviewed for any specific reason
* giving directions
* following directions
* participating in informal one-to-one conversations to exchange information, solve problems, report, give directions, request action
* participating in informal small group conversations for various purposes

Writing

* completing forms
* creating forms
* listing "what to do"
* entering appointments and deadlines on calendars
* making notes before interviews or before writing letters, memos, etc.
* taking notes at meetings, workshops, seminars, during interviews, etc.
* writing "formal" letters, memos, reports, minutes of meetings
* writing informal notes to request information, suggest someone read something, raise a question, praise an action, comment on another written item, give directions, respond to an informal written or oral request, etc.
* writing formal speeches
* preparing agendas for meetings

Reading

* own calendar, appointment book, "to do" list
* directions on pieces on equipment
* memos, letters, and reports
* notices on bulletin boards
* company publications (newsletter, employee handbook, etc.)
* instruction manuals and procedures manuals
* minutes of meetings
* forms to be completed

* informal notes from coworkers, supervisors, subordinates
* own notes (prepared for any of the reasons listed above under "Writing")
* file labels
* relevant magazine, journal, or newspaper articles

Many of these activities undoubtedly seem trivial, but they all involve communication and they add up in terms of time workers spend communicating. That's why companies are concerned about the overall communication process--the "little" activities as well as the ones workers might consider critical. In fact, some companies worry more about those everyday activities because they know that workers are more likely to think twice about their communication skills when the stakes are high. For example, most employees will be conscious of communication dynamics in performance reviews, important sales presentations, or problem solving sessions. But in everyday activities, most people simply assume they are communicating effectively.

THE DIFFICULTY OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The truth is, however, few people are able to communicate effectively most of the time. Transferring an idea, clearly and accurately, from one mind to another is not easy. In fact, it is so difficult that one communications expert suggests that learning to "minimize miscommunication" is a far more realistic goal than learning to communicate clearly.

The major reason communication is so difficult is that meaning does not reside in words, but in people. Dictionaries give us a false sense of security because they lull us into believing there are clear meanings for every word. As a result, we forget that different people are likely to interpret the same word or phrase in different ways. For example, if you survey ten people, you will probably get ten different answers to questions like these:

* what makes a town a "small town"
* what's a "good salary"
* what would be a "nice raise"
* how soon is "soon"
* what is "old"

* what is "productive"
* what is "pleasant"

In the context of when someone expects to receive a college degree, the word soon might be interpreted as meaning anything from "within a few weeks" to "within a year". However, in the context of telling a secretary to type a report, the word soon would be probably be interpreted as meaning something from "begin within the next 30 minutes" to "begin sometime before the end of the next week." Not only will different people give different answers, but the same person who interprets "type this soon" as "within the next 30 minutes" might interpret "receive a degree soon" as "within a year." In other words, a person who thinks in terms of the short end of the range within one context may think in terms of the long end of the range in another context.

How any dictionary actually defines soon is practically irrelevant. People will act upon their own interpretations of soon--or any other word. It is in this sense, then, that "the meaning resides in people, not in words." How any individual interprets a word or phrase depends on many factors. Some are related to the specific communication situation (the verbal context, the speaker or writer's tone, the receiver's mood or frame of mind, the environment, et cetera). Other factors affecting how an individual interprets a word or phrase are much more personal or idiosyncratic. (The rest of this module focuses on the personal factors that affect interpretation. The factors related to the specific communication situation are discussed in the "Speaking and Listening" module and the "Nonverbal Communication" module.)

Life orientations

Every individual has "a life orientation" that is the result of his or her goals, experiences, values, et cetera. This personal "life orientation" also affects the meaning people give a word or phrase. For instance, someone who has grown up in Texas will have a different "high temperature" in mind when talking about a "hot day" than someone who has grown up England. And executives will think of "personal income" in terms of annual salary (plus, perhaps, expense accounts and interest income, etc.) while line workers will think in terms of hourly wages.

Every receiver, then, has a personal life orientation. And every message received, whether verbal or nonverbal, passes through that receiver's personal "filter" or orientation. It is part of the process of interpreting or decoding the message, but it is a part that the sender cannot control. In fact, this personal filtering or interpreting is often a process that both sender and receiver are unconscious of. Most of us mistakenly think that our meanings--our ways of interpreting words and phrases--are universal. So we hear comments like this, "Don't be ridiculous. Everybody knows that soon means within the hour."

Human nature complicates this problem of different interpretations. When other people do not understand what we mean, we tend to blame them. Depending on who the receiver is, we may say, "He's so stupid" or "She's so stubborn" or "See how uncooperative he is" or "I told you she was lazy". When we're the listeners and do not understand what's been said, the same blaming mechanism works. Sometimes we blame ourselves ("Why am I so dumb"), but more often we blame the sender.

To minimize miscommunication, we must remind ourselves that communication is difficult because

* meanings are in people, not in words
* different people will have different interpretations for the same word or phrase.

If we want to communicate, to understand and be understood, we must keep evaluation out of it. Different only means "not the same"--it does not mean "my interpretation is right and yours wrong" and it does not mean "yours is right and mine is wrong". Once we accept different interpretations as a "fact of life", it is easy to avoid unproductive "who's right/ who's wrong" arguments and to concentrate on understanding what the other person's interpretation is.

Perception and expectations

Our individual life orientations do more than affect our interpretations of words and phrases--they affect our perception and expectations, our whole outlook on life. We do not all see,

or even look for, the same things. For instance, when we meet people, we notice and remember different things. One person might be able to describe all the jewelry a new person was wearing; another could recall eye color and the kind of shoes but not even remember if the new person wore jewelry. It is because we notice different things that witnesses to crimes or accidents can each provide unique information.

Many experiments have demonstrated that our expectations affect what we physically perceive (see, hear, smell, et cetera) and how we feel. Subjects told to imagine images on a screen will not notice that faint images are being projected onto the screen. When asked, they will contend that the images were their own mental creations.[1] Patients given placebos (sugar pills) and told the pills are sleeping pills or pain killers will often report that the pills create the desired effect. Other experiments indicate the same phenomenon: we see, feel, hear, smell, etc. what we expect to see, feel, hear, smell, etc.

However, our expectations do more than influence what we perceive -they influence <u>how we interpret</u> what we perceive. Several factors enter into personal interpretations of messages. Here we will look at four of the more common ones: general outlook on life, position, stereotyped ideas, and individual labels.

<u>Outlook on life</u>

If two people see 4 ounces of milk in an 8 ounce glass, one may describe the glass as "half full" and the other as "half empty". They both perceive the same quantity but interpret it differently. The difference is caused by different outlooks on life, the different ways individuals <u>usually</u> perceive themselves in relation to the world. When we mention outlook, we talk about people being basically optimists, pessimists, or realists; about having positive or negative attitudes; about feeling in control (internal locus of control) or feeling controlled by external forces; about being self-confident or anxious and insecure.

Whatever terms are used, the individual's basic way of looking at life will affect his or her interpretation of situations, of messages received, and of messages sent. Here is just one example. If a supervisor walks into a work area and finds employees at their own stations but laughing and talking,

one supervisor might interpret this positively (workers are happy and relaxed and therefore productive). Another supervisor might interpret this negatively (workers are playing instead of working and are lazy). A third supervisor might interpret this as an unknown, something to find out about (could be a good sign or a bad one or simply neutral). The supervisor's outlook will affect the interpretation, and the interpretation will affect what he or she says (words chosen) and how (tone of voice, pitch, etc.).

Position

An employee's position in the organization can also affect how messages are interpreted. If management announces that in the future, employees must punch in and out for breaks, the line workers may interpret that message as "They don't trust us" or "They think we're machines--they give us no freedom or dignity"; some line supervisors may interpret it as "I now have more work to do (checking four more times each shift on each time card) and no more pay and no more help"; the person with the vending machine contract may interpret it as "a possible problem--see if more rigid breaks reduce my income"; the director of the employee assistance program may foresee dissatisfaction and interpret it as a potential problem; the vice president of production may see it as "a wise decision that could help line supervisors (no more monitoring break times) and increase production".

Stereotyping

Stereotyping presents a specific problem in this expectation-perception-interpretation chain. When we stereotype, we label an individual in terms of some group and expect the individual to behave as a "typical" member of the group. (The group can be based on almost anything--race, age, sex, national origin, geographical origin within the United States, religion, position in the company, etc.) The expectations we have of members of that group (both positive and negative) may then affect our perception of the individual's behavior and our interpretation of his or her verbal and nonverbal messages.

For example, if a female supervisor responds to an employee's request with "I'll think about it and let you know tomorrow," the employee may label her indecisive, dumb, wishy-washy, even incompetent. If, however, the supervisor had been a

male, the employee might label him deliberate, thoughtful, conscientious, etc. The different interpretations could be the result of the employee's expectations (based on sexual stereotypes) that "women can never make up their minds" and that "men are good decision makers". So, what the receiver gets out of the verbal message (either "there is no telling what she'll do" or "he'll really consider it and make a reasonable decision") can be affected by who the sender is and what the receiver's expectations are.

Individual labels

Individual labels present a similar problem in the perception-expectation-interpretation chain. We don't just label people by the groups they are members of--we label them individually. At worst, these individual labels are based on hearsay ("Stone over in accounting is a real hothead" or "Brooks from the quality control group is a nice guy--cooperative and funny"). At best, individual labels are based on our own experiences with the other and our own like or dislike of the other.

One problem with individual labels is that we seem reluctant to ever modify or change them. As a result, we interpret what we see and hear in such a way that it supports or reinforces our labels. Here's one common example. If a coworker I like suggests that the bulletin board be moved to the wall next to the vending machine, I might label the suggestion as "sensible" or "logical"--something that reinforces my notion that this is a person with good ideas. However, if the coworker making the suggestion is someone I don't especially like and someone I consider as "too ambitious", I might see the suggestion as unnecessary and self-serving--just another attempt to "make points" with management. The bottom line is we all tend to interpret behavior and messages so that our interpretations support the labels we already have applied.

Here's another example. Assume Green presents Jones with a request to approve 120 hours overtime for Green's work group. Jones responds, "If you're sure you really need this, I'll try. But things are tight right now and I can't promise anything." If Green sees Jones as cooperative and supportive, Green may interpret the response as, "If there's any way it can be done,

Jones will do it." In other words, Green would read a commitment into the verbal message. However, if Green perceives Jones as generally uncooperative and hostile, Green may interpret the response like this: "Jones doesn't really think we need it and he won't even try, but he hasn't got the guts to say 'No'." In this case, Green would be reading denial or rejection into the verbal message. If Green perceives Jones as neutral but reasonable and direct, Green may interpret the message as "I don't know. We may get it or we may not--it'll depend on other factors." So, depending on Green's perception of Jones (his individual label for Jones), Green could interpret the same verbal message as meaning essentially "yes", essentially "no", or "perhaps".

Summary of the Difficulty of Communication

Communication is very difficult because meaning resides in people, not in words or messages. The sender and receiver do not perceive the same things and do not interpret in the same way. The diagram on the next page may help summarize the factors which operate in both sender and receiver and which affect how each interprets verbal and nonverbal messages.

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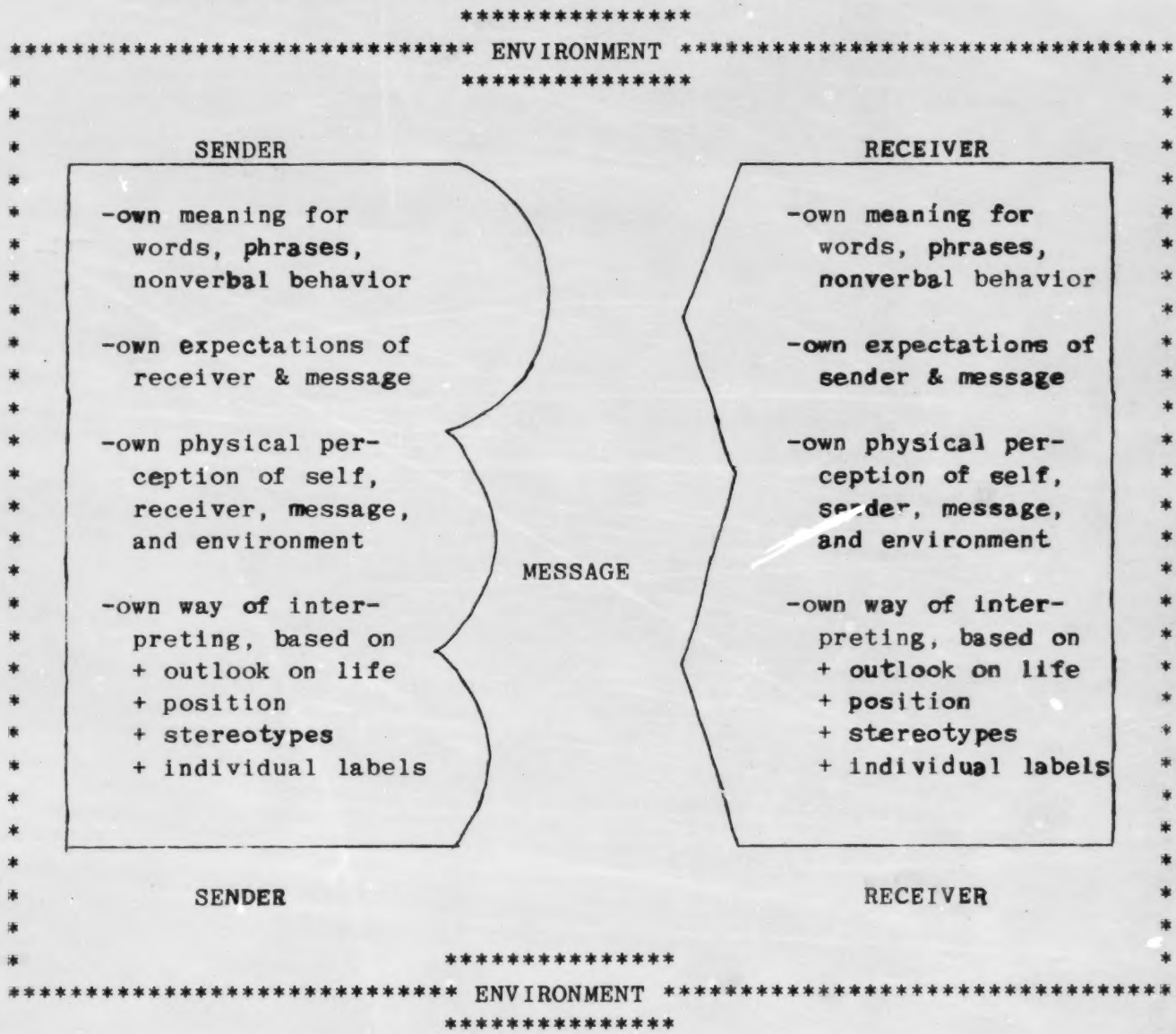
[1]Sydney J. Segal, "Processing of the Stimulus in Imagery and Perception," in Imagery: Current Cognitive Approaches, ed. Sydney J. Segal (New York: Academic Press, 1971), p. 76.


ENVIRONMENT
SENDER
-own meaning for words, phrases, nonverbal behavior
-own expectations of receiver & message
-own physical perception of self, receiver, message, and environment
-own way of interpreting, based on
+ outlook on life
+ position
+ stereotypes
+ individual labels
MESSAGE
RECEIVER
-own meaning for words, phrases, nonverbal behavior
-own expectations of sender & message
-own physical perception of self, sender, message, and environment
-own way of interpreting, based on
+ outlook on life
+ position
+ stereotypes
+ individual labels
SENDER
RECEIVER
ENVIRONMENT

BASICS OF COMMUNICATION: Exercises

1. Briefly describe what you would ordinarily mean by the underlined words in each of these phrases.

   a <u>small</u> <u>town</u>

   a <u>good</u> <u>salary</u>

   a <u>nice</u> <u>raise</u>

   get that done <u>soon</u>

2. Below are two statements. Briefly describe what you think your supervisor would mean by each if he or she made the statement to you in passing.

   "You seem to be slacking off lately. You need to improve."

   "You're doing a much better job. Keep up the good work."

THE BASICS OF COMMUNICATION: Summary Sheet

Communication is an essential part of our everyday lives. To express our ideas, values, and needs, we can speak, write, or gesture; to learn what others are thinking and feeling, we listen, read, or watch. Because these activities are so common, we often take them for granted. Yet these various forms of communication fulfill a basic human need--the need to understand and be understood. The need to communicate is so basic that we can punish others by taking away the privilege of communication (sending children to their rooms or prisoners to solitary confinement).

To understand and be understood, however, involves more than being physically able to speak and listen or write and read. For communication is a dynamic process involving four elements that interact: sender, receiver, message, and environment. In this process, the sender may be a speaker or a writer, the receiver a listener or reader or observer, and the message either words (spoken or written) or actions.

Each of these elements is constantly changing. For example, in a speaking situation, the speaker is affected by the changing environment, by his thoughts and the sound of his own voice, by the actual words or message, and by the nonverbal response (the facial expressions, body position, movements, etc.) of the listener. The environment is affected by the sounds and movements of speaker and listener. The listener is affected by his own thoughts, the environment, the verbal message, and the nonverbal cues received from the speaker. Finally, the message, both verbal and nonverbal, changes in response to changes in the other elements. This interaction of elements makes communication an open system filled with feedback. The result is that what appears to be a simple process is actually very complex.

WHY ARE BUSINESSES SO INTERESTED IN THIS PROCESS?

Communication is the basis of many everyday work activities.

Speaking and Listening: telephone conversations, meetings, interviews, training sessions, one-to-one conversations, informal small-group discussions, instructions etc.

Writing: completing forms; making notes for calendars, meetings, phone conversations; taking messages; writing formal and informal memos, letters, etc.

Reading: directions, bulletin board notices, memos, letters, notes, instructions on equipment, company newsletter, manuals, etc.

THE DIFFICULTY OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Transferring an idea, clearly and accurately, from one mind to another is not easy. Here is what happens in communication. One person sends a message (words and actions) to another (the receiver). The receiver first perceives it (sees, hears, smells, feels, etc.) and then interprets (assigns meaning to) what he or she has perceived. This sounds simple, but there are two big problems:

(1) we don't all perceive the same things (witnesses notice and remember different "facts").

(2) we don't interpret in the same way (what you mean by soon may not be what somebody else means).

Everybody has a "life orientation". This life orientation is the sum of your values, interests, goals, experiences, opinions, et cetera. And it affects what you perceive and how you interpret what you perceive. Although everything is part of your life orientation, these four factors are most likely to affect your interpretation of messages at work.

* your outlook on life (Are you usually an optimist, a pessimist, or a realist? Is your attitude usually positive or negative?)

* your position (Are you a clerk or a manager, a line worker or a supervisor, the newest employee or someone with years of seniority?)

* your stereotyped ideas (Do you expect women to behave in a certain way? What about older people or Blacks or Jews or Yankees or even accountants?)

* your individual labels (Do you assume that so-and-so will get angry at your request because "everybody knows he's hothead"?)

Each of these factors (and many others too) will affect what you perceive and how you interpret messages. These factors are part of your life orientation, and they can create real barriers to communication. So, be aware of them and remember

** everybody has a different life orientation
** because of their life orientations, different people will have different meanings for the same words and phrases
** meaning resides in people, not in words

Where Can I Get More Information on the Basics of Communication?

—in human development courses like HD 105, 106, or 107

--in communications courses like Com 131 and 132

--in psychology courses like Psy 105

BASICS OF COMMUNICATION: Application

1. a. Describe a situation when two people had trouble communicating because they had different meanings for the same word or phrase.

b. What was the result of this miscommunication? (frustration? anger? wasted time? humor? task incorrectly completed? task not completed? etc.)

c. Could this situation have been avoided? If so, how? If not, why not?

2. a. How much of your work time is spent in communication-based activities? Estimate the time you ordinarily spend on each form of communication each day or each week.

speaking and listening _____

reading _____ writing _____

b. For two weeks, keep a log of your work-related communications activities. You may use the format suggested on the back of this sheet. If possible, make entries once during your work shift and again at the end of each work day. Remember to include everything from reading bulletin board notices to discussing vacation schedules during breaks.

LOG OF COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

In the appropriate column, briefly describe specific activities and estimate the time involved.

Date	SPEAKING & LISTENING ACTIVITIES		READING ACTIVITIES		WRITING ACTIVITIES	
	Description	Time	Description	Time	Description	Time

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

I. OBJECTIVES: The student will be able to

A. describe a one-way communication process

B. explain the chief advantage and the chief disadvantage of one way communication

C. describe a two-way communication process

D. explain the chief advantage and the chief disadvantage of two way communication

E. define the term "feedback"

F. list at least five steps a speaker can follow to improve verbal communication

G. list at least five suggestions for getting more feedback

H. list five tips for improving listening habits

II. MODULE MATERIALS

A. Instructor's Review of Topic

B. Case Histories: Speaking and Listening

C. Student Summary Sheet: Speaking and Listening

D. Application

III. OTHER RESOURCES

A. Communications: HEMI Module (a kit designed for those responsible for training managers in higher education). The kit contains some background information, a videotape, exercises and handouts, as well as diagrams suitable for transparencies. The videotape (which is divided into short 3 to 8 minute segments) includes role playing to improve active listening and get more feedback. At Richland, all HEMI modules are kept in the office of the President's Administrative Assistant.

B. Frank, Allen D. Communicating on the Job. Glenville, Ill.: Scott Foresman and Co., 1982. Chapter Three ("Using Language to Communicate Clearly"), Chapter

Five ("Listening to Understand and to Help"), and Chapter Six ("Communicating and Responding to Build Working Relationships") are particularly relevant.

C. The Power of Listening, a 30 minute, 16 mm. color film. Uses school and business context to present facts about listening, demonstrate poor listening habits, discuss cultural attitudes toward speaking and listening, and role play ways to improve listening (develop active or effective listening habits).

D. Rogers, Carl R. On Becoming a Person. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961. A whole work is useful for background on active listening, but chapters 3, 13, 14, 17, and 18 are particularly relevant for teachers and managers.

E. Verbal Communication: The Power of Words, a 30 minute, 16 mm. color film. An overview of oral communication including disappointment of miscommunication, discussion of the speaker's responsibilities for effective communication, demonstrations of one and two way communication, and pointers for getting feedback.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: A Review for Instructors

Communications experts estimate that 90% of all communication is oral. Because speaking and listening are common activities, we often take them for granted and assume our own skills are fine. When we are misunderstood, we blame the listener for not paying attention; when we misinterpret what we hear, we blame the speaker for not being clear enough. Instead of blaming others, we can focus on our own speaking and listening habits and improve them.

ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION

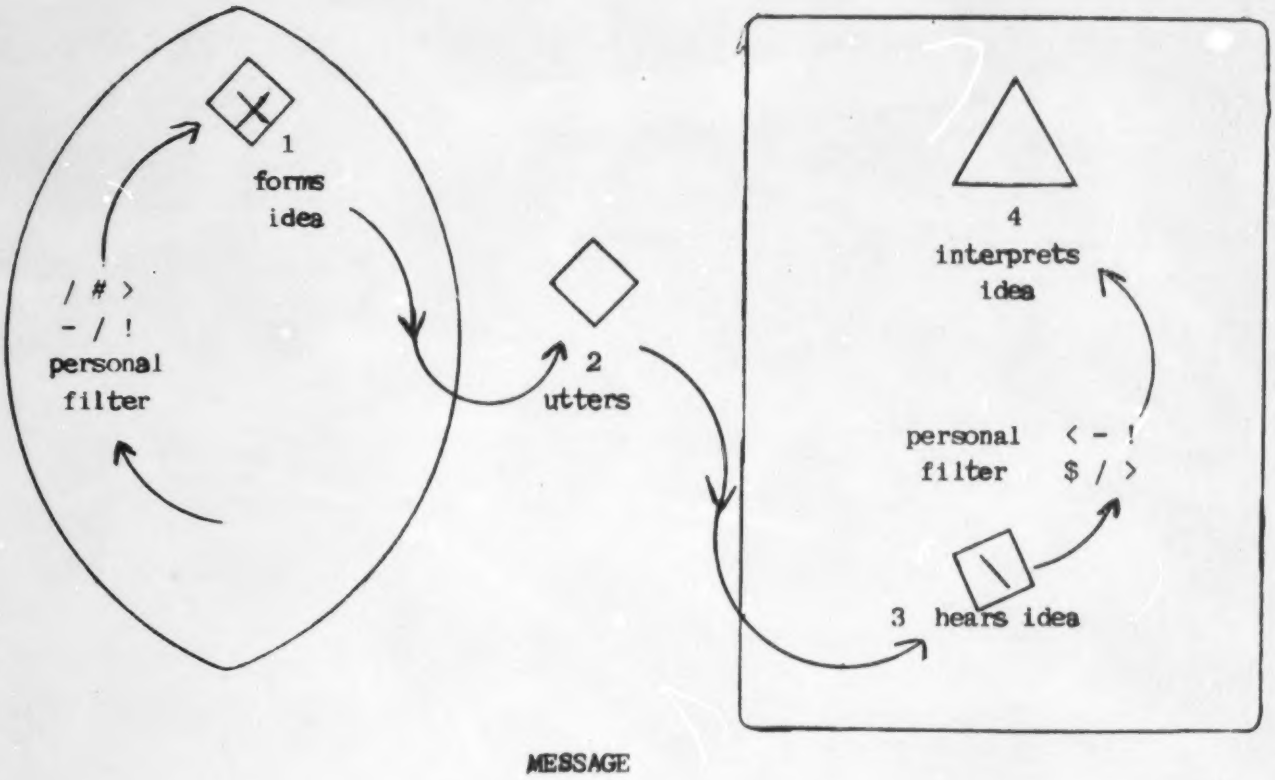
The shortest form of verbal communication is one-way communication; it is a four step process widely used in business. It works best for giving simple directions or orders and passing along short messages. The chief advantage of one-way communication is that it is quick; the chief disadvantage is that it is less accurate than two-way communication (or dialogue).

The four steps of one-way communication

1. Sender formulates the idea (mentally creates the message)
2. Sender utters the idea (projects the message into the environment)
3. Receiver hears the message (physically perceives the words)
4. Receiver interprets the message

This process appears simpler than it is. Listing the steps hides the fact that the basic elements (sender, message, environment, and receiver) are changing and that the sender and receiver are each operating from different life orientations. The diagram on the next page tries to depict the one-way process and suggest the changes that occur during it.

THE ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION PROCESS

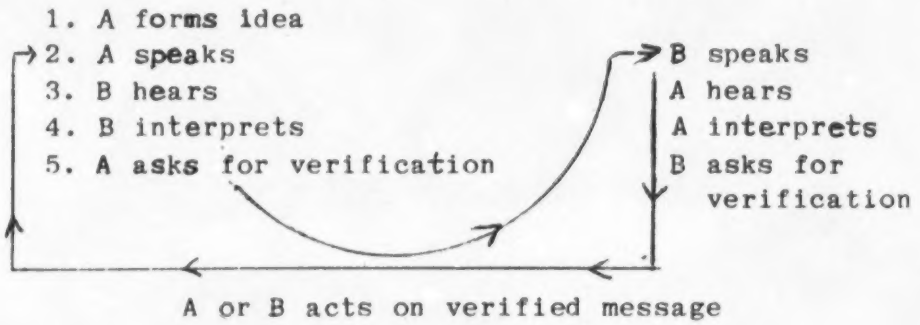


The speaker in the diagram begins with an idea depicted as a diamond with an X in it, but the message actually uttered appears as a plain diamond; what the receiver hears after the message has travelled through the environment is represented as an angled diamond with a slash through it. Yet when that passes through the receiver's personal filter (or "interpreter"), it is modified and appears as a simple triangle. The problem is that the triangle (not the sender's original x-marked diamond) then forms the basis for the receiver's actions. The real difficulty with one-way communication is that those involved may not even suspect that there has been any miscommunication until the sender sees that the receiver's actions do not match the sender's expectations.

Even though one-way communication does not include verbal feedback from the listener, two forms of feedback are operating. One is the listener's nonverbal feedback. The listener's facial expressions, gestures, posture, amount of eye contact, and other cues can suggest the degree of attentiveness and in some cases the nature of the response (positive or negative, puzzled or understanding). However, nonverbal cues are not easy to read accurately, and many of the most obvious ones (nodding head in agreement) are consciously sent and easily faked. The other form of feedback in one-way communication is self-feedback: the speaker is hearing his or her own voice. By listening carefully and observing nonverbal feedback from the listener, the speaker can, while speaking, modify the message to meet the receiver's needs.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Two-way communication is not as fast as one way because it includes a fifth step, asking for verbal feedback. This changes the process from a relatively closed one to an open system with the listener becoming a speaker and the process beginning again. Here is one way to illustrate this process with A representing the original speaker (initiator) and B the original listener.



The chief advantage of two-way communication is that it is usually more accurate because the speaker and listener can compare interpretations and discover possible differences before either acts. The chief disadvantage is that two-way communication requires more time than one way. As a result, two-way

communication is most valuable and cost effective when the message is important, long, or complex.

THE SPEAKER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Most communications experts feel that it is the speaker who is responsible for effective communication. Why? First, the speaker is the one who initiates the exchange, the one who first indicates a need to communicate. Second, the speaker is the one who must give the listener the opportunity to respond. In other words, the speaker has greater control and must be responsible for using that control to help make the exchange effective. Here are six steps a speaker can take to improve the quality of verbal messages.

1. The speaker can create a climate conducive to communication.

Because the speaker initiates the exchange, the speaker controls when and where it takes place. A speaker who really wants feedback from the listener will try to make the environment conducive to two-way conversation. He or she will select a place where both speaker and listener can be comfortable and where each can easily hear the other. The more important the message, the more carefully the speaker should try to control distractions (both sights and sounds). A speaker interested in getting feedback will also select a time for the exchange that allows both parties to speak.

If the setting (both time and place) is not appropriate, the listener will receive a "double message". It does not make sense for a speaker to mention an important idea and ask for feedback when the speaker is "on the run" to a meeting; the listener will assume that the speaker does not really want any response other than a quick assent. It also does not make sense for a speaker to give directions "in passing" or "on the run" because the listener can easily misinterpret. For instance, to one listener a speaker's hurried manner may make unimportant comments sound more urgent than intended; to another listener, a speaker's hurried manner may mean the listener misses or disregards the important points ("he didn't really mean that--he was just in a hurry").

2. The speaker can be direct and say exactly what is meant.

Most of us rely on pet phrases, especially for asking questions. Often these phrases do not say what we mean. Here are a few examples:

Phrase	Real Meaning
"Have you seen Terry?"	Where is Terry?
"Do you know where the X file is?"	Bring me the X file.
"Do we have any coffee?"	Get me a cup of coffee.
"Is Pat in [around]?"	May I speak to Pat? OR Send Pat in to me.

To those who know us well, such phrases do not cause any communication problems, but they do waste time. For instance, in the last example, if the phrase "Is Pat in?" is used, someone has to respond with a yes or no and then ask if the speaker wants to talk with Pat; if the speaker initially says exactly what is meant, then the listener has only to make one response ("I'm sorry, but he's not in" or "Just a moment and I'll connect you").

3. The speaker can use specific but simple words and phrases.

A speaker concerned about communicating effectively will remember that meaning is in people not words. By using specific words, the speaker can increase the chances that the listener will understand. Words that describe actions, time, and judgements especially need to be specific. Here are some examples of what to say and what not to say:

General terms to avoid	Specific terms to use
ACTION WORDS AND PHRASES:	
clean up, straighten up	mop, vacuum, dust, etc.
straighten out	alphabetize, stack, etc.
check out these figures	add them again, call the source, see if they've been copied correctly

look over this memo	read it for your information, check for typographical errors, tell me if this makes sense to you, etc.
speak up	speak more clearly, speak louder, make more comments in meetings, etc.

TIME WORDS AND PHRASES:

soon, quickly	by 2:00 p.m., by next Monday, within the next hour, etc.
when you have a chance	any time this week, any time today, etc.
right away	within the next five minutes, within the next half hour, etc.

JUDGEMENT WORDS AND PHRASES:

looks good	I approve OR this is attractive, etc.
you need to improve	produce better quality work, produce more work, take shorter breaks or lunches, etc.

By using specific words or phrases and avoiding general terms, the speaker improves the quality of verbal messages.

4. The speaker can use short sentences.

Long, rambling sentences are difficult to follow, especially when they are spoken. Readers have an advantage over listeners because if readers "get lost" in a sentence, they can go back to

the beginning of the sentence and try again. Listeners do not usually have that choice: they must be able to follow each idea and understand each sentence as it is spoken. In speech, the end of a sentence is marked by a downward vocal inflection (drop in pitch) and a pause. The pause helps the listener assimilate the information.

How does this work? Well, we know that it takes less time to think than to speak. The average person can probably think at a rate of 400 to 500 words a minute; however, the average person speaks at a rate of 125 words a minute.[1] A good listener uses the extra "thought time" to "replay" what the speaker is saying. In effect, the good listener will mentally repeat a sentence, summarize it, and relate the idea of the most recent sentence to previous sentences. These activities increase the listener's comprehension of the material. However, if sentences are long, the listener has more material to review between pauses (and fewer pauses for mentally catching up if the review gets sidetracked). A common result is that the listener's comprehension suffers.

What is the ideal length for a sentence? There is no answer that applies to every situation. However, readers are most successful in understanding sentences that contain an average of 12 to 18 words.[2] For listeners to be successful, sentences should be the same length or a little shorter. The average listener has trouble remembering more than seven items in sequence. (To demonstrate this, call out random words or numbers in a monotone voice; most students will have trouble correctly recalling sequences of more than seven items.) Because words in sentences are logically related, they are easier to recall than random words. In effect, the listener forms a logical unit out of a series of individual words and then remembers that logical unit as one item. As a result, a listener can easily understand sentences that are longer than seven words, but the logical units within the sentences (the phrases and clauses) should be short--no more than seven or eight words each. In addition, the number of word groups (logical units) within a sentence should not exceed seven or eight.

5. The speaker can ask for feedback.

Asking for feedback is probably the most important step a speaker can take to improve communication. By asking for feedback, the speaker changes the process from one-way communication to two way and gives the listener an opportunity to explain how he or she has interpreted the message. If the listener did not interpret what the speaker intended, the speaker explains in greater detail. Constructive dialogue ensues. Eventually each party understands clearly what the other means. That's the theory. The reality, however, can be quite different.

There's a big difference between asking for feedback and being effective in getting feedback. Anyone can ask, but only a skilled speaker willing to put forth effort can be regularly effective in getting feedback. A speaker must take several steps to become effective in getting feedback, and these steps are important enough to deserve separate consideration (see "How to become more effective in getting feedback").

6. A speaker can listen carefully to responses.

Like asking for feedback, learning to listen carefully to others' responses requires skill and effort from the speaker. Obviously, it makes little sense for a speaker to put forth effort to get a response if he or she doesn't intend to listen carefully to the response. Yet, it happens. People often fail to listen carefully because they do not realize that listening requires mental activity and skill. They mistakenly think that if the sounds have entered their ears, they have listened. Effective listening involves far more than physically perceiving sounds--it means developing and using good listening habits. However, the idea of listening as a skill is an important but relatively recent concept (in terms of the history of western civilization), that will be discussed separately (see "How to improve listening skills").

HOW TO BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN GETTING FEEDBACK

The whole idea of getting verbal feedback is for the original speaker to determine whether the listener has understood

what the speaker intended. A second (but optional) purpose is for the original speaker to discover what the listener thinks of the message. In theory, all a speaker needs to do is ask the listener for a response. However, asking does not necessarily bring a response that fills the purpose of feedback. Often, in fact, the response does not provide a clear picture of the listener's understanding or ideas. Why?

There are two closely related reasons for the reality of feedback being different from the theory: the speaker's attitude and the speaker's method. The two are practically inseparable. If a speaker asks for feedback but doesn't really want it, the listener will probably know because the speaker's method will reflect his or her attitude. It is easiest to see the relationship between attitude and method in speakers who don't really want verbal feedback to open the lines of communication.

Behavior of those who don't really want feedback

Speakers who want to be able to say they asked for feedback but really only want listeners to say "O.K." (or "I understood" or "I agree") will ask questions that only demand one or two word answers. Such speakers will also make it very difficult for a listener to make negative comments. If a listener pauses during a response, the speaker will jump back into the conversation, cutting off the listener's answer. Such speakers want, at least to some extent, to be considered "good guys"—people who ask for feedback—but their approach is perfunctory.

Attitudes of those who don't really want feedback

If, despite their perfunctory requests for feedback, they do get substantial responses instead of minimal phrases, they are very likely to blame the listener whenever the response does not match what they had hoped. Essentially, their attitude toward their listeners is negative: they have little respect for what the listener has to say. Despite any lip service they may give to the idea of communication being a process and meaning residing in people, they basically believe that anyone who does not immediately understand their messages is stubborn, stupid, or inattentive; they are also likely to label anyone who disagrees with their

plans or who points out possible problems as a "troublemaker" or a "fool".

What all this means is that the first step to being effective in getting feedback is to have the right attitude--to want feedback. Those who really want feedback operate from these basic assumptions:

(1) communication is a process
(2) meaning resides in people not words
(3) different people have different meanings for the same words and phrases
(4) the speaker is responsible for effective communication

In other words, those who want feedback know that because communication is a process, they may not have actually said what they meant to say. They also realize that even if they did say clearly what they intended, the listener is likely to have a different meaning for the message. They expect differences in interpretation, respect the listener's right to a different meaning, and do not blame the listener when differences become apparent.

Speakers with the attitude just described will want to hear the listener's interpretation of the message. They know they cannot assume the listener understands what they intend. They also realize that the listener must talk if they are to determine what the listener's interpretation is. So, they ask open-ended questions, questions that require more than one or two word answers. They also avoid tag questions because a tag question is not really a question at all. A tag question is really a statement of the expected answer followed by a short phrase or "tag" that asks the listener to agree with the speaker. For example, "You'll have this by noon, won't you?" is a tag question. The speaker clearly expects the listener to say "yes" or "sure".

The best way to understand how the form of a question affects the listener is to study different examples. A few examples appear on the next page.

BAD Closed Questions	WORSE Tag Questions	GOOD Open-ended Questions
Can you do this?	You can do this, can't you?	How will you begin?
Do you understand?	You understand, don't you?	What do you think?
Will you have this done by X ?	You will have this done by X , won't you?	When will you have this done?
Do you anticipate any problems?	You don't anticipate any problems, do you?	What problems, if any, do you anticipate?

The form of the question definitely affects the listener's response. Closed questions lead the listener to very short responses (usually no more than one or two words like sure, yes, okay, maybe, no, I'll try, etc.). Closed questions are bad because they do not require the listener to say much; in that sense, they defeat the purpose of feedback (finding out how the listener has interpreted the message). Tag questions are worse because they reveal the speaker's view, encourage very short responses, and almost force the listener to agree with the speaker's view.

So, speakers who want feedback--those who really want to know what the listener understands--will begin with open-ended questions and will carefully avoid tag questions. Closed questions, however, can be effective if they follow open-ended questions. Look at this sample dialogue:

Open-ended question: "When will you be able to complete this?"

Response: "I should be done sometime tomorrow."

Closed question: "Could you possibly have it done by noon tomorrow?"

The speaker interested in getting feedback also makes it easy for the listener to express problems or negative considerations. The speaker does this by being the one to introduce the possibility of trouble. The speaker who mentions negatives is saying, in effect, "I really do want to know your

reaction--both what you think will please me and what you think might not." However, the issue of possible problems, like all issues, should be raised with open-ended questions so the listener feels free to comment (see sample questions above).

The final step for becoming more effective in getting feedback involves listening. Getting the listener to discuss ideas and interpretations is not the end of the speaker's responsibility: the speaker must also listen carefully to those responses. To be effective as a listener, the speaker must be active. "Active listening" is a term borrowed from psychologists to describe a set of behaviors that one person can exhibit to encourage the other to continue talking. Here are some of the key behaviors associated with active listening:

a. maintain eye contact, nod head, say "umm" or "uh-huh" or use similar encouraging sounds

b. let silences ride for a while to give the other time to think and respond

c. echo last word or key word with a question in your voice to encourage the other to elaborate, explain, etc.

d. restate the other's response in question form ("So you think, then, that ____X____?") so that the other person knows you have been listening and have understood and so that you can verify you have understood the other correctly

Essentially the active listener (1) must physically appear interested (see a above), (2) must not rush the other (see b and c above), and (3) must prove that he or she has heard and understood the other's ideas or position (see d above). To be able to behave like an active listener, the original speaker must have the right attitude--the attitude described at the beginning of this section. In addition, the original speaker must learn to withhold judgment while the other is responding; otherwise, feedback will be cut off.

Most people clam up when they feel they are being judged. According to Carl Rogers, "the major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of

the other person or other group."[3] For Rogers, the effective listener must be able to empathize--to put himself in the other's position or "listen with understanding". He describes it this way:

> Real communication occurs, and this evaluative tendency is avoided, when we listen with understanding. What does this mean? It means to see the expressed idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to him, to achieve his frame of reference in regard to the thing he is talking about (pp. 331-332).

An active, empathetic approach to listening "leads to improved communication, to greater acceptance of others and by others, and to attitudes which are more positive and more problem-solving in nature" (Rogers, p. 334).

Summary: How to Be More Effective in Getting Feedback

1. Want feedback (have the right attitude)
2. Begin with open-ended questions
3. Avoid tag questions
4. Ask for negatives using open-ended questions
5. Encourage the listener to respond more fully by using active listening techniques

HOW TO IMPROVE LISTENING HABITS

Being able to speak effectively has long been considered an important tool for gaining power--social power, financial power, political power, even religious power. So, the idea of training people to become effective speakers is an old one, often motivated by desire for power. However, the idea of training people to become effective listeners is a relatively new one in western civilization. For centuries, listening was not even considered an activity: those with power (men) spoke, and those without power (women and children) remained silent. There was

speech and the absence of speech--silence. When listening was considered an activity at all, it was associated with submission and powerlessness. Because listening requires no physical activity, it has been considered something anyone can do, something that requires no training and no skill.

In recent years, however, more attention been devoted to listening. Perhaps the most dramatic example of concern about listening appeared in an ad. The Sperry Corporation placed a two page ad in the March 10, 1980 issue of Newsweek (pp. 86-87). The large print read, "Most of an executive's time is spent listening. Yet it's the thing he or she is least qualified to do."[4] The ad refers to two other relevant points: "(1) Research studies show that on the average we listen at 25 percent of efficiency; (2) Ideas and information get distorted by as much as 80 percent as they travel through the organization" (Frank, p. 137).

Companies like Sperry are concerned about listening because it consumes a significant amount of work time. The amount of time spent listening varies with the worker's position. McGregor says, "the supervisor may listen from 45 percent to 65 percent of the time" (p. 6). Others say that white collar workers spend 40 percent of the ordinary workday listening.[5] Frank summarizes the situation by saying that though research results vary somewhat, "it is safe to say that workers in a wide array of occupations spend up to one-third of their total working hours listening to others" (p. 139).

While the amount of work time spent listening is high, the quality of listening is usually low. Research studies indicate that most people are poor listeners. In the 1950's, R. G. Nichols tested the listening skill of hundreds of business and professional people as well as several thousand students. He reported that immediately after a short talk, listeners could recall only half of what they had heard; two months later, they remembered only about one- fourth.[6] Another study conducted on students of Michigan State University indicated that immediate recall was low ("only 6-27 percent could remember the first point of a lecture") and comprehension weak ("about 50 percent could relate factual detail to the major points of the Lecture, and about 60 percent could answer accurately when asked to draw inferences from the materials presented").[7]

Why are so many people poor listeners? What is it that makes someone a poor listener? The answers seem to lie in the attitudes and behaviors of listeners. Here is a list of the most common characteristics of poor listeners.

Attitudes and Behaviors of Poor Listeners

1. They believe they are good listeners.
2. They fake attention while daydreaming or thinking of something unrelated.
3. They take extensive notes.
4. They formulate their responses while the other is speaking.
5. They listen for facts, not ideas.
6. They evaluate and judge the speaker (appearance, speech patterns, etc.), not the message.
7. They do not ask questions when they don't understand.
8. They avoid difficult listening (situations that require concentration).
9. They often believe they know in advance what the speaker is going to say (what the meaning of the overall message will be).

To overcome bad listening habits requires effort. It means seeing listening as a mental activity, not a polite waiting period or a "necessary evil to be endured until I get my turn." Those serious about becoming better listeners need to practice using good listening habits. After all, effective listening--whether it is general listening (being part of an audience) or "active listening"--involves skills. And those skills can only be developed through practice. Here are five steps the beginner can practice to improve listening.

How to Improve Listening Habits

1. Have a goal and work at listening instead of faking attention.

2. Listen for ideas, not just facts.

3. Focus on the content of the message instead of judging the speaker and the delivery.

4. Use your extra thought time to summarize, anticipate speaker's next point, evaluate strengths and weaknesses of points, and assess nonverbal cues instead of phrasing your replies.

5. Practice difficult listening (listening to unfamiliar or complex material or listening in emotionally charged or physically unsuitable environments)--don't avoid it.

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[1]Georgette McGregor, What a Supervisor Should Know About Improving Communications Skills (Chicago: Dartnell Press, 1980), p. 5. Other writers give different figures, but all suggest that thinking rates exceed speaking rates by roughly 300 to 400 words a minute (wpm). Frank, for example, indicates a speech rate of 150 wpm and a thinking rate of about 600 wpm. See Allen D. Frank, Communicating on the Job (Glenville, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1982), p. 146.

[2]Even in good writing, average sentence length varies a bit. What is an effective average depends on the audience and the content. However, writing that averages more than 20 words per sentence does not usually communicate clearly—even to educated audiences. The Wall Street Journal, the New Yorker, and other respected publications average fewer than 20 words per sentence.

[3]Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person, Sentry Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p.330.

[4]Sperry Corporation advertisment as cited by Frank, p. 137.

[5]R.G. Nichols, "Listening as a 10-Part Skill," Nation's Business, July 1957 as cited by Frank, p. 139.

[6]R.G. Nichols and L.A. Stevens, Are You Listening? (New York: McGraw Hill, 1957) as cited by Frank, p. 137. Although this study and the next were completed many years ago, the results are still considered a reasonable index of listening efficiency. As Frank and others point out, nothing has occurred in recent years that would necessarily improve listening habits.

[7]K.F. Robinson and E. J. Kerikas, Teaching Speech: Methods and Materials (New York: David McKay, 1963), p. 262 as cited by Frank, p. 138.

CASE HISTORIES FOR SPEAKING AND LISTENING

These brief case histories can be used as examples in lecture or class discussion, as situations for role-playing ineffective and then effective communication, or as the basis for written exercises (identify the type of communication used, the "mistakes" the speaker and listener made, the steps the speaker could take to improve verbal communication, and/or write a message the speaker could have used to communicate more clearly, etc.).

Case History #1: Lost Bid Analysis

Before going to a morning meeting, boss reviews calendar and decides to delegate the task of analyzing lost bids to her assistant. She wants the assistant to begin on it the next day. On her way out of the office, she says, "Why don't you do the lost bid analysis for next week's directors' meeting. It's important, so don't put it off." The assistant interprets the message as "begin immediately" and does.

When the boss returns two hours later and asks for the final draft of another report, the assistant doesn't have it ready. The boss explodes, "You were nearly done with that when I left. What have you been doing for the last two hours?" The assistant responds, "Doing what you told me to do--starting on the lost bid analysis. You specifically said I needed to begin it right away." "No I didn't. You weren't listening. I told you to begin that tomorrow." ET CETERA

Case History #2: Citrus Fruit Stock

The grocery store manager walks through produce section to see if floors have been mopped and notes that citrus fruit stock looks low. He stops the produce manager to tell him to have the crates unpacked for the late morning rush. Nodding toward the floor, the store manager says, "Good job. The area is looking good, but you need to build up the citrus fruit section." The produce manager responds, "No problem. I'll get right on it." Then, glowing from the praise intended for the cleaning boy, he checks with a supplier to see if he can order tangerines or tangelos for the citrus fruit section.

An hour later the store manager walks through the stockroom and sees the oranges and grapefruit still in crates. He calls the produce manager and criticizes him for not following through as he had promised.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: Summary Sheet

Communications experts estimate that 90% of all communication is oral. Because speaking and listening are common activities, we often take them for granted and assume our own skills are fine. When we are misunderstood, we blame the listener for not paying attention; when we misinterpret what we hear, we blame the speaker for not being clear enough. Instead of blaming others, we can focus on our own speaking and listening habits and improve them.

Types of Oral Communication

ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION: the speaker sends the message (both verbal and nonverbal) through the environment to the listener who interprets the message and acts on his or her interpretation of the message.

> One-way communication is faster than two way communication and works best when the message is short and relatively simple. The disadvantage of one-way communication is that the speaker does not know how the listener is interpreting the message. The listener may have understood clearly what the speaker intended, understood less than intended, understood more than intended, or understood something quite different (not heard a key phrase or word or heard the wrong word, etc.)

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION: the speaker sends the message (both verbal and nonverbal) through the environment to the listener who interprets the message; then the speaker checks with the listener to determine if the listener has interpreted the message as the speaker intended. Checking the listener's interpretation means getting feedback, and this part of the process involves dialogue or periodic verbal exchanges between the speaker and the listener.

> Two-way communication is slower than one way, but it is usually more accurate. Two-way communication works best when the message is long, complex, unfamiliar to the listener, or important. By using feedback to verify the listener's understanding, the speaker can identify and correct any misunderstanding before the listener acts on a misinterpreted message.

What A Speaker Can Do To Improve Verbal Communication

1. Create a climate conducive to communication.
2. Be direct--say exactly what is meant.

   To locate Terry, say "Where's Terry?" not "Have you seen Terry?"
3. Use specific but simple words and phrases.

   Say "by 2:00 p.m." instead of "soon"; "alphabetize these files" instead of "straighten out these files".
4. Use short sentences.
5. Ask for feedback.
6. Listen carefully to the response.

How to Be More Effective in Getting Feedback

1. Want feedback--really want to know how the listener has interpreted the message.

2. Begin with an open-ended question. (Ask "How will you begin?" or "What problems do you foresee?" or "What do you think?" The goal is to get the listener to say enough for you to determine if the listener understands what you intended.)

3. Avoid "tag" questions. ("You'll have this by noon, won't you?" is a tag question. The speaker clearly expects the listener to say "yes" or "sure". Contrast that with "Can you have this done by noon?" This question does not assume any particular answer; the listener is free to say "yes" or "no" or "I'm not certain, but I'll try.")

4. Ask for negatives in a positive way. (Say "What problems do you anticipate?" not "You don't expect any problems, do you?")

5. Encourage the listener to respond more fully by using "active listening" techniques:

   a. maintain eye contact, nod head, say "umm" or "uh-huh" or use similar encouraging sounds.

   b. let silences ride for a while to give listener time to respond

   c. echo last word or last key word with a question in your voice

   d. restate the listener's response in question form, "So you think, then, that __X__?"

How to Improve Your Listening Habits

1. Have a goal and work at listening instead of faking attention.

2. Listen for ideas, not just facts.

3. Focus on the content of the message instead of judging the speaker and the delivery.

4. Use your extra thought time to summarize, anticipate speaker's next point, evaluate strengths and weaknesses of points, and assess nonverbal cues instead of phrasing your replies.

5. Practice difficult listening (listening to unfamiliar or complex material or listening in emotionally charged or physically unsuitable environments)--don't avoid it.

Where to get more information:

--in human development courses like HD 105, HD 106, or HD 107

--in communications courses like COM 131 or 132 or SPE 105

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: Application

Describe a situation when you felt you were "not heard".

What did the listener do (how did he or she behave) that made you feel you were not being listened to?

What were the immediate effects? (How did you feel? What did you do or say? etc.)

Describe any long-term effects. (Have your attitudes toward each other changed? How do you feel about approaching this listener now? etc.) If there were no long term effects, what did you do to avoid them? What, if anything, did the other person do to avoid them?

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